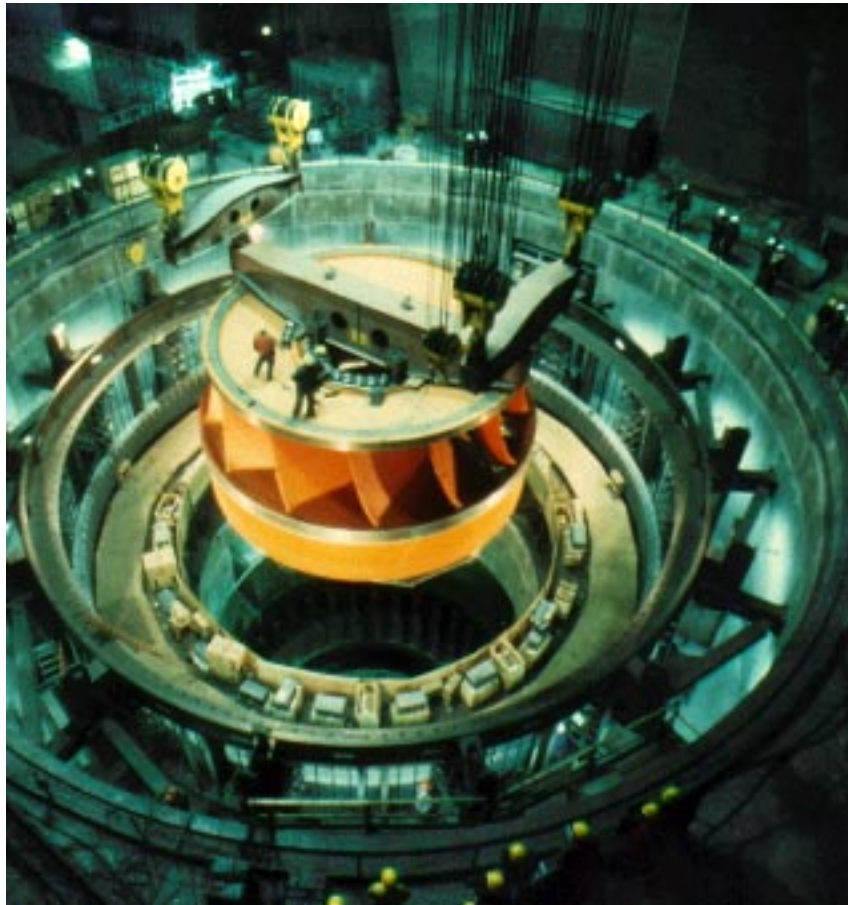


CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE



Reclamation is a leading supplier of electricity in the western United States. Each year its 58 power plants generate more than 42 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity, which is the energy equivalent of more than 80 million barrels of crude oil — enough to meet the annual needs of 14 million people.

1 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) serves millions of people in the western United States. Through its operation of more than 600 dams and reservoirs, the agency delivers 10 trillion gallons of water per year to more than 31 million people, including 20% (140,000) of the West's farmers, who in turn produce 60% of the nation's vegetables and 25% of its fruits and nuts. In addition, Reclamation's 58 hydroelectric power plants produce an average of 42 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually — enough to meet the needs of 14 million Americans (U.S. Bureau of Reclamation [USBR] 1998a). Reclamation facilities also are used by millions of recreation enthusiasts. More than 80 million people visit Reclamation facilities annually.

In the past decade, Reclamation's role has evolved to meet changing societal needs. Its original mission of dam building has, for the most part, been completed. It is unlikely that any new federally funded dams will be built, given their high financial and environmental costs. At the same time, expanding and shifting populations, along with a greater interest in environmental protection, have increased the demands for scarce water supplies in the West. In recognition of the changing priorities for water development in this region, Reclamation's mission was officially changed in 1994. Its current mission is to "manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public" (USBR 1997a). According to the agency (USBR 1998b), this mission places greater emphasis on:

- Water conservation, recycling, and reuse;
- Partnerships with customers, states, and tribes;
- Finding and bringing together competing interests to address everyone's needs;
- Transferring the operation of some facilities to local beneficiaries who might use them more efficiently; and
- Achieving a higher level of responsibility to the taxpayer.

In addition to making internal changes, Reclamation has been mandated by the Executive Branch to become more involved with its customers. In Executive Order (EO) 12862, President Clinton directed Reclamation to conduct customer surveys. In its Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 1997–2002 (USBR 1997a), Reclamation recognized this need to survey its customers. Strategy 15 called for Reclamation to better communicate and share information with its diverse customer constituency. As part of the Strategy, the following goal was established:

“Determine the kind and quality of service being provided by Reclamation and gauge the level of customer satisfaction. Conduct an agency-wide customer satisfaction survey and publish the results. Maintain a standard of quality for service provided to the public that will equal the best in the business.”

In its 1994 Customer Service Plan (USBR 1994), Reclamation had broadly defined “customers” to include three groups of people:

- **Customers** are those individuals or entities that use or receive products, services, or information that result from the processes Reclamation performs. Examples include irrigators, rural and urban water and power users, recreationists, and Native Americans.
- **Partners** are those groups, agencies, or entities that jointly assist Reclamation to serve its customers. Examples include water districts, power marketing administrations, local utilities, and other government agencies.
- **Stakeholders** are interested parties who do not receive services directly. Examples are national interest groups, States, and the Congress.

Unfortunately, this definition of customers was at odds with the definition provided in EO 12862, which did not include partners or stakeholders. Moreover, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which must approve all governmental surveys, also disagreed with Reclamation's broad definition; OMB would not approve the survey for stakeholders. Ultimately, stakeholders were removed from the survey. Additional discussion on this issue is provided in Sections 2.1 and 4.1 of this report.

Reclamation asked Argonne National Laboratory (Argonne) to design the Customer Satisfaction Survey instrument, pilot test it against a small sample of Reclamation's customers, help get OMB's approval to conduct the survey, and conduct the survey among a representative number of Reclamation customers. The purpose of the survey was to help Reclamation (1) gauge the level of satisfaction among its customers and (2) determine ways it could improve its practices to better serve its customers. This report describes the survey process and presents its results.